

E. COLI FOODBORNE ILLNESSES

Escherichia coli 0157:H7 (*E. coli*), an emerging source of foodborne illness, causes an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 cases of infections in the United States each year. Although no cases have yet been reported in the NPS, the potential is growing for such infections and park staffs should be aware of its causes and consequences.

Typical symptoms include abdominal cramping, diarrhea and bloody stools. Occasionally this infection results in kidney failure, causing over 150 deaths per year, primarily among children under 5 years of age and the elderly.

Most illness has been associated with eating undercooked, contaminated ground beef at restaurants and in homes. Infection has also occurred after drinking raw apple juice or milk and after swimming in or ingesting sewage- contaminated waters.

A small percentage of cattle are infected with *E. coli*. The organism can become thoroughly mixed within meat during grinding from beef contaminated during slaughter. *E. coli* present on cow s udders and milking equipment can contaminate milk. The organism can also be spread from contaminated hands.

Infections from this strain of *E. coli* can be prevented by:

- thoroughly cooking ground beef (155 degrees Fahrenheit for 15 seconds). The cooked meat should be gray or brown throughout (not pink) and the juices should run clear.
- Washing and sanitizing utensils after contact with raw ground beef.
- Washing hands carefully and frequently with soap to reduce risk of spreading *E. coli* infections (and other infections) from the sick to the healthy.
- Consuming only pasteurized apple juice and milk and milk products.

REFERENCES

Health Information, National Center for Infectious Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services

If you have any questions, please contact your Regional Public Health Consultant or park sanitarian, or call WASO Public Health for more information at **202-565-1120** or see our NPS Public Health web page at **www.nps.gov/public_health/**.

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